



PREVENTION \* LAW ENFORCEMENT \* RESEARCH

# Maine Fire Marshal News

Maine State Fire Marshal's Office • Fire Research

January 2009

Maine Department of Public Safety

Fire Marshal's Web Page

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## WELCOME!

Welcome to another issue of the Maine Fire Marshal News. It's hard to believe that the first issue of this newsletter was sent out in March 2006! Three years and twelve issues later here we are still encouraging you to take some time to read the newsletter and send us your own article for a future publication. We appreciate the feedback on the newsletter many of you sent in 2008 and look forward to hearing from you more in 2009.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE MARSHAL



The value of a good public information program is amazing. I'd like to share with you an experience I had recently that confirmed why I believe in PSAs.

Recently the Office of the State Fire Marshal, in collaboration with the Maine Association of Insurance Companies put together a series of heating fire safety public service announcements. The effort grew out of a concern shared by many

organizations that high energy costs and the need to stay warm would stimulate an increased demand for, and use of, alternative heating sources. We all agreed that such devices can be used safely with careful planning, installation, operation and maintenance but the lessons of history were hard to ignore. Some people have not always exercised the appropriate caution needed to use these devices while others simply didn't know about the dangers they can pose. So with support from the insurance industry I put together a script and agreed to deliver a series of messages about the dangers the devices can pose if used improperly in addition to a number of tips on proper use.

The messages began airing on Maine television channels in September and are still running. The messages focus on a variety of fixed and portable heating devices, chimneys, and basically how they should be used and maintained to avoid disaster. Each message ended with the tag line "Don't lose your life to save money." Our office also posted a section on our web page devoted entirely to heating safety. I really appreciated working with the insurance industry and their genuine concern about heating safety but the most rewarding event came in an e-mail message I received last week.

A Maine resident e-mailed me the following note: "I think your new ad may have saved my house and perhaps our lives. My wood furnace was emitting smoke every time I opened the door

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*to stoke it. I saw the ad and wondered if...[someone] had taken care of having the chimney cleaned after the last heating season. I got someone here to check it out and they took four huge buckets of creosote out of the chimney! The reason it was smoking was a chunk of creosote that had fallen off the lining of the chimney and was blocking the smoke from going up the chimney. Shows the importance of the ad. I don't know how long it would have taken me to figure out what was wrong. For sure I'll have it cleaned every year! Thanks."*

Having been in the fire service now for over 35 years I've grown to appreciate all aspects of fire service work ranging from responding to fires through to targeted public education programming. This individual's comment however demonstrates how valuable public information can be. I would have to say that the e-mail I received from this individual is as rewarding to me personally as any award or pat on the back I've received during my career.

On a lighter note, please take some time to read the newsletter. This 12<sup>th</sup> issue will include a welcome to some new staff members here at the office, a farewell to a great K-9 public servant, and a retrospective on fires in Maine during 2008 and why it may have been a unique year. Please enjoy these and all the other pieces included in this issue.

As always, let me conclude by wishing all Maine citizens and those visiting a safe and happy winter. Take some time to enjoy all the great outdoor activities available to us here in Maine. Thank you.

Sincerely,



**John C. Dean**  
Fire Marshal



**Home Fire Sprinkler®**

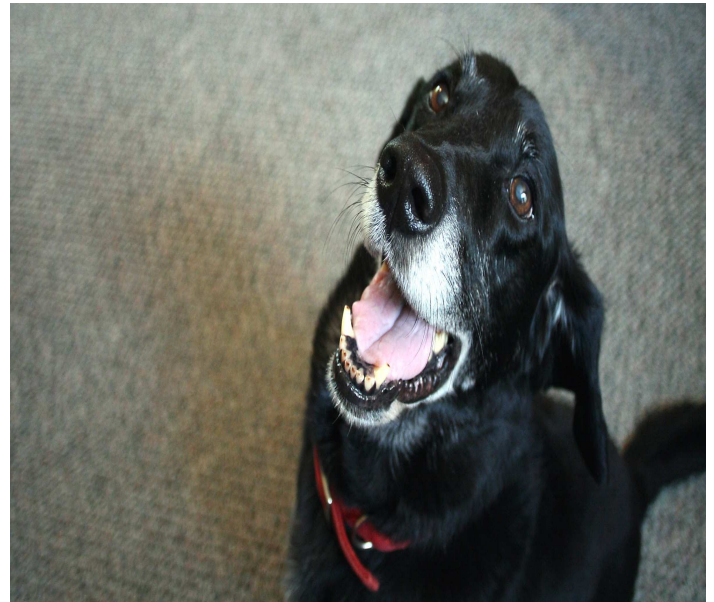
**COALITION**

Protect What You Value Most™

## **No longer on the scent: Midnight has retired**

**By Julia Davis**

**Reporter - Lakes Region Weekly**



Midnight

CASCO (Sep 12, 2008): Like many black labs, Midnight loves playing fetch. Unlike most black labs, she also enjoys finding evidence of arson on suspects and at the scene of fires.

For more than 11 years Midnight has traveled with her handler, Rick Shepard, an investigator with Maine State Fire Marshal's Office, to aid him in his work. She has been his companion on late nights and during long drives to investigate fire scenes all over Maine.

Next week when Shepard goes to work, Midnight will stay at home. Almost 13 years old, Midnight retired Sept. 4. Though a new fire dog named Shasta will take over for the southern district of the office, Shepard will not be her handler.

"I will forever be comparing dogs to her," Shepard said, who himself is four years away from retirement. Midnight was trained to identify fire accelerants, including gasoline, lighter fluid and kerosene. She even once identified a tire softener illegally used to improve traction in stock car racing.

According to State Fire Marshal John Dean,



Rick Shepard, an investigator with the Office of the Maine State Fire Marshal shares a moment with Midnight, a 13-year-old black Labrador who helped Shepard investigate fire scenes for 11 years. Midnight retired Sept. 4. (Photo by Harmony Motter)

Midnight was trained in Alfred through a program operated by State Farm Insurance since 1992. Since Shepard works at stock car races as his second job and brings Midnight with him, officials who suspected a driver was using a tire softener filled a room with tires and Midnight picked the four belonging to the driver in question.

The State Fire Marshal's Office investigates the cause of fires and explosions, and inspects fireworks displays and mechanical rides. There are 10 fire marshals in the state, soon to be 12. Each fire marshal is assigned a geographic area, but with Midnight Shepard traveled all over the state and was on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

#### Earning her keep

Her training used food as a reward, so Midnight ate when she worked. This meant Shepard's job included practicing with her every day, placing drops of 50 percent evaporated gasoline in a variety of locations and feeding Midnight when she found them.

The day Midnight retired, Shepard fed her from a bowl for the first time in over 11 years. She looked at him like it was a trick, Shepard said, and was reluctant to eat. Several days after her retirement, Shepard placed drops of gasoline on two different pieces of furniture in his home office in Casco.

When Shepard picked up a fanny pack filled with dog food and hooked a leash to Midnight's collar, she quickly got down to business. "Seek," Shepard said. Midnight started scanning his office for drops of gasoline. Finding the scent, she sat in front of a filing cabinet. "Seek," Shepard repeated, now with dog food in his hand. Midnight pointed her nose to the spot where Shepard dropped the gasoline and then looked to her handler for food.

"Show me again," Shepard said. "Show me better." She pointed again and again before Shepard reached down to feed her out of his hand. "Good girl," Shepard praised, patting her head. When he unhooked the lease, Midnight raced around the large, open office, playful again.

"She loves to work," Shepard said. "She will play ball until she drops of exhaustion." A dog is only as good as her handler allows her to be, Shepard said, emphasizing the importance of not falling into a routine in terms of where, when and how much gasoline to drop for her to find. "The more you mix it up, the better the dog will be," Shepard said. "This is a pretty labor intensive deal."

#### A nose for the job

Using a dog at the scene of a fire helps investigators pinpoint the best areas to take samples, Shepard said. Before dogs, Shepard said fire marshals themselves would pick up handfuls of material and sniff it to try to find accelerants. When they worked fires together, Shepard marked each spot where Midnight pointed with a golf tee, later collecting material to send to a lab for analysis.

With a sense of smell 50,000 times greater than found in humans, a desire to please handlers, and a robust, friendly nature that makes them easy to live with, Labradoodle retrievers are the preferred breed for investigating fire scenes, Dean said. During her career, Midnight also identified suspects. In a line-up, Midnight once identified a man because of traces of an accelerant on his clothing. Though he initially denied setting two houses on fire, he later pleaded guilty to the charges.

She also worked on the triple homicide case in Old Orchard in February where 21-year-old Matthew Cushing was accused of killing his mother, brother and



stepfather and setting their house on fire. Originally from the pound, Midnight was adopted by Shepard when she was 9 months old. She was his third fire dog.

In the beginning of her career Midnight completed a five-week training program and was recertified annually.

Shepard and Midnight will clearly miss each other when Shepard goes off to investigate fires without her, but he said he wants to have a few good years of retirement with her. They've fallen through floors together, Shepard said, and Midnight was once hit by a pickup truck at a fire scene. Shepard will still take Midnight with him in his second career helping out at local race tracks when he retires.

"It's been the greatest part of my job – working with her," Shepard said. "She's my bud. We've been through a lot."

## **A LOOK AT FIRES IN 2008:** **FATALITIES AND DOLLAR** **LOSSES**

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

Civilian fire fatalities only increased by two, from twelve to fourteen, a 16% increase. 33% of those fatalities involved Maine citizens over the age of sixty-five. Still the total account reflects a continuing downward trend. Maine also lost a Hartland firefighter in action in the town of Detroit. What was unusual about 2008 was the number of fires resulting in high property loss or property cost.

A series of fires beginning in July resulted in considerable property damage in addition to temporarily lost jobs. The Washburn and Doughty boatyard in Boothbay is probably the most notable. The fire was started by sparks from a cutting torch, burned down the entire 50,000 sq. ft. structure. Estimated damages from the fire were \$30 million and 65 employees were laid off temporarily. The costs in terms of lost productivity and wages have not been calculated. The company however is in the process of

rebuilding. The picture below shows the boatyard fully involved.



Also in July a fire destroyed several businesses and displaced 18 residences in the small town of Northeast Harbor. The businesses destroyed included a bakery, art gallery, an antique shop and other small businesses. A propane tank explosion was believed to have started the conflagration.

In September, an intentionally set fire devastated the small town of Milo. A pub, flower shop, old movie theatre used for storage, pool hall, arcade and hardware store were all destroyed as the fire made it's way up the main street comprised primarily of old wooden structures. A number of individuals and one family living in the buildings were also displaced. The economic impact of the fire was considerable on the small community.



**Milo Fire**

In October a lumber mill in Canaan was destroyed causing an estimated \$300,000 damage in addition to displacing workers. In early

December a fire destroyed a warehouse in Paris containing \$10 million dollars in inventory. The fire lasted for several hours and smoldered on for days. The 15 employees got out safely but lost their jobs.

An estimated 45 fire departments and hundreds of firefighters as well as the Coast Guard were involved in fighting these fires. The total response costs in addition to the overall social and economic impact of these fires made it an unusual year.

Maine also suffered some losses of a historic nature. In January, a 188 year-old house in Norridgewock was destroyed. Amos Fletcher built the house considered to be one of the most historic in the area in 1820 (the year Maine became a state). Mr. Fletcher's descendents were the Doles known for making their fortune from pineapples. (photo below)



Norridgewock Fire

In Livermore the Norlands Living History Center lost a barn though firefighters from Leeds, Farmington, and Dixfield were able to save the

nearby mansion containing most of the historic artifacts. Finally, in December a fire in the historic district of Hallowell destroyed the Winthrop Street historic house built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The house was currently being restored by the owner and was referred to as a "historic place in our community."

## **WHEN TO CALL A STATE FIRE INVESTIGATOR**

By Sergeants Tim York and Ken Grimes, State Fire Investigators

The purpose of this article is to try to clear up some confusion regarding when we are

required to be called. We want to assure you that nothing in this article should be taken to imply that we do not want you to call the Office for assistance.

The duty officers for the State Fire Marshal's Office routinely get requests for our services from a variety of different sources. It has come to our attention over the last few years that there is a lot of confusion and misinformation about when the State Fire Marshal's Office needs to be called to assist with a fire investigation.

State law is a good place to start to try and answer this question. 25 M.R.S.A. §2394 states that "when property is destroyed or damaged by fire, the municipal fire inspector shall investigate the cause, circumstances, and origin of the fire." In general the State Fire Marshal's Office is not required to investigate the origin and cause of every fire.

Below is a list of some myths and truths about calling an investigator:

- **Myth:** The dollar loss is over \$100,000.  
**Reality:** There is no monetary figure which triggers a response.
- **Myth:** I called because it is insured or I called because it is not insured.  
**Reality:** The insurance status of the property is not an issue for response.
- **Myth:** I just wanted to let you know we had a fire.  
**Reality:** Mandated reporting is done through MEFIRS.
- **Myth:** A family pet died.  
**Reality:** This is certainly traumatic to the family, but there is no requirement in State law for us to investigate based solely on this.
- **Myth:** The insurance company is going to want a report.  
**Reality:** If the fire is accidental your MEFIRS report will provide the needed incident report documentation to the insurance company. Reporting the cause of a fire as undetermined is OK.



<http://www.smokefreeforme.org/>

When do you need to call us? This is the easiest question to answer. Fatal or personal injury fires, a suspected arson fire, serious injury or death involving a firefighter, law enforcement officer, or EMS provider, and an explosion which caused a fire. Any serious burn injury or death, which is caused by flame, to include cooking, brush fires, and intentional acts also needs to be reported.

When will we respond?

This is the most difficult part of our job. It is very beneficial for us to have some basic information available to us when we are talking on the phone together. The owner's names, if the building was occupied, what happened, are there any eyewitnesses, and why do you believe the fire is suspicious are a few examples of questions we might ask you. When we ask the question, Why do you need us, and your response is, because I do with no supporting information, it is extremely difficult for us to be able to justify the expense of calling out an investigator. Our response can be fit into four categories. These are immediately, next business day, as resources allow, and no response.

We will immediately respond for fatal and serious personal injury fires. If there is physical evidence suggesting that the fire may be arson we will more often than not respond immediately as well.

Next business day responses would include general assistance to the municipal fire inspector to determine origin and cause, impounded vehicle fires as resources permit, and suspected arson fires with no apparent physical evidence present.

Examples of "as resources permit" fires would be impounded vehicle fires and fires that are declared accidental by the fire chief but our assistance has been requested as a second opinion. No response generally occurs when the duty officer and the fire chief have

communicated and both parties have agreed that we do not need to respond.

We would encourage you, if you have any questions, to always call. Someone from the Fire Marshal's office is available 24 hours a day 365 days a year to assist you with your fire investigation. The sergeants from the office are willing to talk to you at anytime of the day or night to answer any questions that you might have. If you want an investigation please call after the fire. You don't need to wait until Monday morning to call. Below is the full text of 25 M.R.S.A §2394.

### **25 M.R.S.A §2394. Investigation of fire origin; Attorney General may direct**

When property is destroyed or damaged by fire, the municipal fire inspector shall investigate the cause, circumstances and origin of the fire, and especially examine whether it was the result of carelessness or of design. The Attorney General may supervise and direct such investigation whenever he deems it expedient or necessary. If arson is suspected, such municipal fire inspector shall immediately notify the State Fire Marshal or an inspector of his office who shall cause a full investigation thereof to be conducted. The State Fire Marshal and his agents or employees shall have the authority to investigate or cause to be investigated any fire or explosion within the State. [1973, c. 632, §4 (AMD).]

## **NEW FACES AT THE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE**

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

The Fire Marshal's Office has four new staff members. A new paralegal, Dorothy Bonsant, formerly of Lipman Katz & McKee here in Augusta, will be working investigations, rule making, and other assignments. We also added investigators Mark Roberts, formerly an investigator with DHHS and the Cape Elizabeth PD and Edward Hastings previously with the Farmington PD. Finally, we also have a new plans reviewer, James Graves formerly with Waterville FD and Bowdoin College.

## MEFIRS – Maine Fire Incident Reporting System

	Current Statistics 2008 (1/14//2009)	Totals for 2007
Total Incidents Reported:	31,962	84,106
Fires:	2,057	5,601
EMS:	18,233	51,843
All others:	11,672	26,662
Fire Departments Reporting	148	200
Total Fire Dollar Loss	\$19,416,716	\$30,753,035
Civilian Fire Related Injuries	28	60
Fire Service Fire Related Injuries	17	45
Civilian Fire Related Deaths	14	12
Fire Service Fire Related Deaths	1	2

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### STATE USES OF MEFIRS

Perhaps the most fundamental use of MEFIRS is in understanding the nature of the fire problem, whether conceived at the local, state, or national level. One indicator of the usefulness of the reporting system is its utilization by the State Fire Marshal's Office in the preparation of the annual report. This information that is gathered from local fire departments provides a resource of statistical data that can then be shared statewide to assist local fire chiefs in determining fire trends and specific areas of fire loss that may need to be addressed. The application of the Maine Fire Incident Reporting System provides the critical link to this data collection sharing.

### LOCAL FIRE DEPARTMENT USES OF MEFIRS

Because of the number of departments that are using MEFIRS, it is difficult to document all of the ways that they are using the data. For departments, in the State of Maine, that rely heavily on MEFIRS for reporting fire statistics, an important advantage is that the local fire departments can compare their own productivity and effectiveness with the State average. They can also seek out statistics on fire departments in communities similar to their own and conduct comparisons. The rich resources available through the Maine Fire Incident Reporting System allow a local fire department to conduct many sophisticated analyses that include the identification of trends in the number of calls to the fire department, the types of calls made, and the origin of calls. This information might be used to determine the best location for a fire station. Data acquired can also provide justification of fire department budgets to the city or town council. The system will allow the fire department to count, for example, the number of brush fires to which it has responded, identify whether the trend is upward or downward, and then make an assessment as to whether the department has enough brush fire resources available to meet the demands for service. There is little doubt that MEFIRS has stimulated many local fire departments to use hard data for their fire protection management decision-making and to improve local fire service delivery.

### STATE PLANNING

As Maine's Fire Protection Services Commission works to plan and eventually bring to Maine a training facility, data from MEFIRS will be extremely valuable. It will be more difficult to justify public expenditures on such a facility absent the capacity to discuss in detail Maine's fire burden. MEFIRS provides that information and therefore every fire department has an opportunity to contribute toward the realization of a training facility in Maine.

***“Fight Fire with Facts”***



# **A FIRE IN CAMDEN** **DEMONSTRATES WHY FIRE** **CODES ARE IMPORTANT**

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

This new structure pictured below from across the water shows the beautiful Bay View Landing facility in Camden. The facility, under construction, was to house a new restaurant on the first floor with rooming and lodging above. That was before the fire December 23<sup>rd</sup>.



On the brighter side, Camden Fire Chief Christopher Farley credited mutual aid training and the State Fire Marshal's requirement for a firewall at the back of the new structure for helping to contain the blaze. (see photo below)



Camden Fire, December 23, 2008.

Chief Farley stated that prior to construction, as a requirement for obtaining a building permit, the Office of the State Fire Marshal required that a cement block firewall be constructed between the new and old buildings on Bay View

Landing. The Chief also noted that he was surprised about the quick failure of the roof trusses which collapsed in about 15 minutes.

## **WOMEN FIREFIGHTERS IN** **MAINE**

Posted by Richard E. Taylor for Marie Fisk and Mary Hauprich

Marie Fisk and Mary Hauprich serve as firefighters on the Islesboro Fire Department. They are members of the one-year-young Water Rescue Team on the island. Both are members of the International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Services (IAWFES) and one will be presenting a workshop at their annual conference in Omaha this spring, while the other will be finishing up schooling for her EMT certification at home.

Both of them are driven to help others, enjoy furthering their education and are training in all aspects of emergency services. It was during training (both locally and "off island") that this pair hatched a plan to connect with women firefighters across the state.

On Saturday, May 2, 2009, Maine's women firefighters will be meeting in the midcoast area (location TBA) for an educational meeting. They are currently lining up guest speakers from within the fire service (wildland & structural), a representative from Maine's law enforcement community, and a representative from the International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Services organization. An open-forum discussion will follow. Topics will include initiating a mentoring system in Maine, training and career opportunities within the fire service, and outreach and recruitment.

"This will be first and foremost a professional gathering," states Hauprich, who cringes and is quick to correct, if someone calls it a 'support' group. "The purpose of getting Maine women firefighters together is all about the job. We're all about seeking out opportunities in areas such as leadership training, hands-on firefighting classes, and specialized training – and bringing this



information to the women firefighters in the state who might not otherwise hear about it.”

“We’re not the groundbreakers,” says Fisk. “The IAWFES has been actively providing women firefighters with training news, mentoring and other services for twenty-six years. Fire Service Women of Illinois and Fire Service Women of New York are two other organizations that provide opportunities for the women in their respective states, and there are others. We’re going to see if there is interest here in Maine to develop a mentoring program, as well.”

“There are so many good people in the fire service, who are so generous with their time and knowledge. If we pool our resources, we pool opportunity, and for firefighters in Maine, that can only be a good thing!”

“The trick is finding them,” states Hauprich. There are no official records of how many women firefighters there are in Maine – or in the US, for that matter,” she continues, undaunted. “But we’ll find ‘em.” She has a list of roughly 215 fire departments, and the prospect of trying to reach them all seems somewhat unrealistic. “Particularly since most departments [in Maine] don’t have full-time administrators or chiefs. Just like the rest of us, fire chiefs have other jobs, other commitments and can be just as hard to pin down!” It is their hope that through media outlets, word of mouth and direct contact, they can reach all women firefighters in the state.

If you’d like to contact Marie Fisk and Mary Hauprich with questions about attending or helping to organize the May 2nd meeting, or, if you’re interested in developing a mentorship you may contact them for more information at: [womenfirefightersofmaine@verizon.net](mailto:womenfirefightersofmaine@verizon.net) or [hauprich13@verizon.net](mailto:hauprich13@verizon.net).

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## **NOVELTY LIGHTER LAWS SPREADING**

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

Maine was the first state to pass a prohibition on the retail sale of novelty lighters. In July of 2008 Tennessee joined Maine in passing similar legislation. As of this month, similar legislation has been filed or will be filed in at least seven other states.

Oregon, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, Arkansas, West Virginia, and Alabama are in the process of filing or have filed legislation to prohibit novelty lighter sales. Many of them have looked at Maine’s legislation prior to proceeding in their own effort. It’s nice to be the first in the nation. On a local level similar prohibitions on the devices are being considered as well. New York City has looked to Maine in planning and developing an ordinance.

## **2009 SIGNIFICANT MULTIPLE FIRE FATALITY FIRES**

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

A “significant multiple fire fatality is one in which three or more individuals are killed. So far in 2009 there have been 10 meeting this definition that have killed 41 people. The fires have occurred in 10 different states.

Of the 10 fires all were in residential dwellings and 5 of them are believed to have been heating related. Ed Comeau, of Campus Fire Watch, has been monitoring these types of fires since 2007. In reviewing the information he’s collected I found that last January there were a total of 41 people killed in such fires while in 2007 the count was 51. Remember, I’m writing this article on January 14, 2009 so we’re only half way through the month.

Maine has been fortunate in rarely experiencing such fires. In 2007 however, a fire in Limestone did claim the lives of three people. For more information on this type of fire go to the following url:  
<http://significantmultiplefatalityfires.blogspot.com/>

## This Month in Fire History

On January 1, 1853 the first practical fire engine was tested in Cincinnati, Ohio.

**AUBURN, ME** On January 31, 1945 Maine experienced perhaps the worst fire in the state's history. A boarding home for children in Auburn, operated by an Eva LaCoste for the benefit of mothers engaged in war work or other daily jobs, burned taking with it the lives of 16 children and 1 adult. The Commissioner of Health and Welfare claimed the boarding home was being operated without a license from the Bureau of Social Welfare. The home had been denied the issuance of a license because it exceeded the maximum of 16 babies required under state code.

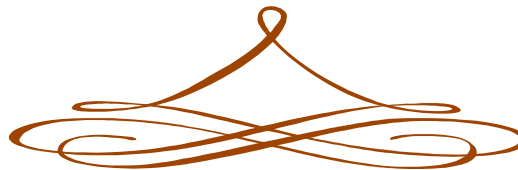
January is also the month of the Rhodes Opera House fire that occurred in Boyertown, PA in 1908. According to newspaper accounts the fire started when a "moving-picture film" machine caught fire causing a panic. Actors performing a play, "Mary Queen of Scots" which was to have concluded with a film presentation saw the moving picture machine catch fire and attempted to calm the audience. As they approached the audience they knocked over oil lamps used as stage lights and the building was now burning at both the front and the back. Of the estimated 500 individuals in the structure 170 were killed and many injured.

163 workers were killed in coal mine fires in West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

Hotel fires in Minneapolis, MN and Fremont, NE killed another 39 people.

## UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Contact us if you like an event or announcement posted.*



The *Maine Fire Marshal News* is an electronic publication of the Maine State Fire Marshal's Office.

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To submit articles for publication contact the Fire Marshal's Office at (207) 626-3870 and ask to speak with the editors. You may also e-mail an article or comment to [Richard.e.taylor@maine.gov](mailto:Richard.e.taylor@maine.gov)

All articles are subject to an editorial staff review prior to inclusion. For a copy of submission requirements contact the editorial staff.

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